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Re-Imagining the Nation

METTE ZØLNER

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Zølner: *Re-Imagining the Nation*

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ROBERT SCHUMAN CENTRE

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Abstract:

The paper proposes to study national identity as a social product of continuous reconstruction processes which are being shaped by three inter-related factors : existing ideas of a national identity, the life-worlds of its social carriers and the social and political context in which reconstruction processes take place. Focusing on a fundamental element of any collective identity, namely the 'other', the paper looks at the reconstruction of national identities by actors in political debates on immigration in the late nineteen-eighties and -nineties. The paper investigates different ways of imagining the same nation, but it likewise compares two old European nation-states, namely France and Denmark. On the basis of four case-studies, the paper argues that reconstructing national identities is a process which is driven by the taken-for-granted values of its social carriers, but also by reflection and strategy.

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Introduction

In the early nineteen-eighties, nations and identity were brought to the attention of scholars by several books which now are classics, such as Anderson (1983), Gellner (1983), Hobsbawm (1983), and Smith (1986). These scholars applied a constructivist approach to identity which subjected objectivist and essentialist approaches to identity to critical scrutiny. Thus, they defined nation and identity as being 'invented' by nationalists (Gellner, 1964:169), as a 're-invention of tradition and history', as a 'rediscovery of old myths' (Smith, 1986:18) and, according to Anderson's widely quoted definition of nations, as being imagined communities. Yet, Anderson also stated that 'Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined' (Anderson, 1983:6, emphasis added). Thus, with this distinction in mind, the question to raise is not whether national history and traditions are invented or whether nationalism invents nations, but rather why one tradition or one nation is imagined in one rather than in another way and why one myth rather than another is rediscovered.

This is the question which this paper examines with the aim of furthering the understanding of the factors which pattern the way in which a nation is imagined by a certain group of social actors. The paper will do so on the basis of in-depth studies of four cases, two from France and two from Denmark[1]. The scope of this paper does not allow me to account fully for the selection of these case-studies (Zølner, 1998), and I will therefore merely state the main reasons for analysing processes of re-imagining the nation in debates on immigration in France and Denmark and, to focus on four groups of actors.

The choice of analysing national identity on the basis of debates on immigration was guided by the theoretical view that the 'other' is a fundamental element of any collective identity, but also by the empirical observation that the idea of the nation became a central point in debates on immigration and refugees in European nations in the latter part of the nineteen-eighties. This was so in France and Denmark, two old states, which became nation-states and which were involved in major chapters of European history to different degrees according to their size and geographical position next to Germany. Yet, the reason for selecting these two nation-states was that conceptions of the nation and national memories of former encounters with the 'other' differ considerably between these two countries, particularly regarding colonialism and the Second World War. Thus, comparing these two national contexts shed light on the way in which existing conceptions of the nation and the memory of the 'other' may pattern reconstruction processes of national identity.

Within France and Denmark, four groups of social actors and their discourse on immigration and the nation are selected according to whether they take part in the public debate and to the accessibility of data. In other words, a decisive criteria is whether one can obtain the required data for an analysis of their discourse as well as of the life which the social actors lived and endured in the French and Danish societies[2]. These criteria lead to the selection of four case-studies in the debate on immigration: the *Club de l'Horloge* (a French political club at the extreme Right-wing which privileged the issues of immigration and national identity from the mid-nineteen-eighties onwards), *SOS-Racisme* (a French anti-racist organisation which in the mid-nineteen-eighties emerged in opposition to the National Front party), New Era and the Danish Association (a Danish newsletter and an organisation which were mobilised in the fervent debate on refugees in the late nineteen-eighties)[3], and finally Young Anarchists (a Danish movement of squatters which progressively got involved into the anti-racist issues in the early nineteen-nineties)[4]. Thus, each case-study represents a well-defined group of social actors who were mobilised in the debate on immigration promoting either pro- or anti-immigrant points of views[5].

Three Sources of National Identity Construction: the Life-World of Social Carriers, Historical Codings and the Situational Context

Before going into the analysis and the comparison of the case-studies, I will briefly present the way in which the conception of national identity will be defined in what follows. A national identity, or a collective identity, will be understood as the sharing of a socially constructed classification system which provides its social carriers with meaning and which they take for granted. In addition, a national identity will be defined as an *imagination* of the nation in the sense given by Anderson (1983) that national identity is believed to be shared by people one has never met, but who are imagined to be alike. It follows that a national identity will be defined as being constituted by that which people subjectively imagine to be their identity.

The social constructivist literature on racism, nationalism and ethnicity provide us with useful tools for understanding the factors which enable and constrain the way in which social carriers re-imagine the nation, on the one hand, and the worries and pre-occupation which they need to explain, on the other hand. The reading of this literature has led me to establish three sources for the reconstruction of national identity: firstly, the social carriers of a national identity and their life-world, the historical codings of the nation in question, and the situational context in which this identity is being reconstructed.

The life-world will be understood as the life which the social carriers of a certain national identity lived, experienced and endured (Schütz & Luckman,

1989). It is within the life-world of social actors that one can observe their essential preoccupations and uncertainties, which they need to explain, and also the social recognition which they desire. Within racial theories scholars hold that essential factors are feelings such as the fear of social decline (Myrdal's research on the poor whites in the United States, 1944), a loss of meaning as a result of modernisation processes or diffuse daily frustration and aggression which are taken out on a socially costless target group which become the scape-goat (Dollard, 1988 [1937]). Barth (1969) argues that the search for social status as well as the desire to preserve one's distinctiveness are fundamental aspects in boundary construction. Finally, scholars on nationalism point to feelings of discrimination (i.e. Gellner, 1983) or status inconsistency (i.e. Giesen, 1993).

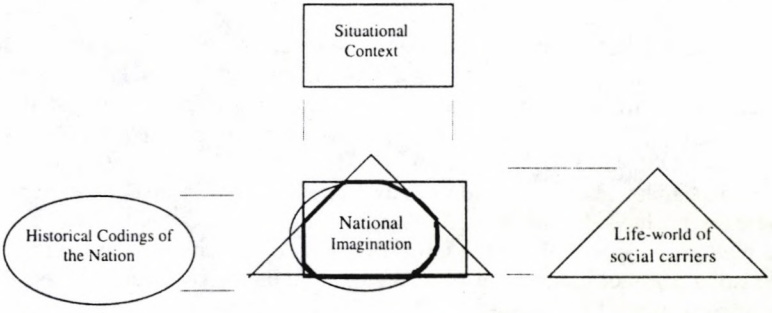
Yet, literature on nationalism, ethnicity and racism also point to the fact that imagining the nation or constructing an 'other' do not start from scratch, nor are they exclusively determined by the life-world of social actors. On the contrary, the selection of boundary markers - that is those significant elements which signify the difference between the in- and the out-group - is also determined by existing images or codings, which are at their disposal. Thus, Smith (1986) argues that 'ethnic roots' determine how a nation may be imagined, whereas other scholars evoke factors such as history or tradition. In a similar perspective, scholars of racism argue that the content of a racial ideology is not necessarily provoked by concrete contact with and knowledge of the racialised group, but rather by the contact with prevalent stereotypes of this group (Dollard 1988 [1937], Myrdal, 1944). Moreover, Morin illustrates that traditional scapegoats, such as the Jews, may be reactivated in a social context where there are no Jews, but a tradition of strong anti-Semitic prejudges (Morin, 1969). In the following, I will use the term 'available historical codings' to refer to such existing ideas or conceptions which either enable or constrain the social actors' re-imagination of national identity.

Finally, the literature points to a third source which is the situational context, in which social actors re-imagine the nation. Situational context will be used in the broad sense of socially determined conditions, prevailing ideas and norms which in the perspective of the social actors are given facts. It is, for example, the fact that in post-war Europe it was no longer salient to argue in racial terms and the boundary marker shifted from a biological to a cultural signifier (Barker, 1981; Taguieff, 1987). Conversely, in the latter part of the nineteen-eighties identity and culture seemed progressively to gain saliency and entered the public debate at the expense of ideological debates and social issues. Social norms and values are likewise important for Barth (1969) who, as mentioned above, argues that boundary markers are selected according to the social status which they enjoy, on the one hand, and their capacity to ensure the distinction in relation to the significant other, on the other. Thus the relation and the interaction with the singificant 'other' achieve a considerable importance for the way in which ethnic identity is patterned. According to a similar logic

Taguieff (1987) illustrates how social actors in the debate on immigration modified and adapted their discourse in order to maintain their distinctive character in relation to other and to circumvent the arguments of their opponents on the other.

On the basis of comparisons of the four case-studies, I will in the remaining part of this paper illustrate how the process of imagining the nation takes place as a dynamic interaction between the above described sources, namely the life-world of the social actors, existing historical codings and the situational context. Thus, my argument is that the national imagination of social actors is enabled and constrained by existing historical codings of the nation, but that these codings are not merely reproduced, but creatively adapted to fit the life-world of the social carriers as well as the situational context.

Figure 1 Illustration of three sources of re-imagining the nation

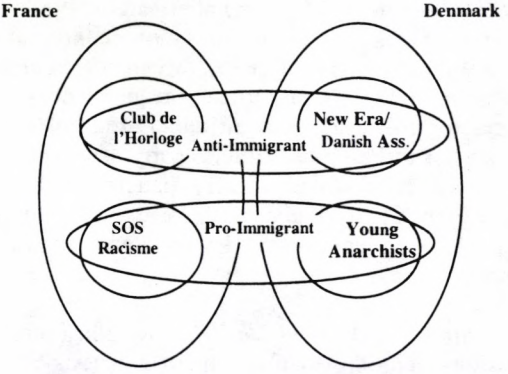


Processes of Re-imagining the Nation

The analysis of the processes of re-imagining the nation will take place on three levels of comparison. The first comparison is between the *Club de l'Horloge*, *SOS Racisme*, New Era/Danish Association and Young Anarchists. This sub-national comparison aims at clarifying commonalties in the way in which social-actors re-imagined the nation in the debate on immigration in the nineteen-eighties and the nineteen-nineties, despite different national contexts and different attitudes to the nation and immigrants. In addition to this sub-national level of comparison, a second comparison will be made between two national contexts, the French and the Danish. This comparison intents to show how different national contexts affect the way in which national identities are imagined. Finally, a third comparison is trans-national in the sense that it is

made between pro-immigrants (*SOS Racisme* and Young Anarchists) and anti-immigrants (*Club de l'Horloge*, New Era and the Danish Association). It points to the fact that though these actors operate within different national contexts, we can observe common features.

Figure 2 Illustration of sub-national, national and trans-national comparisons



Sub-National Comparisons

When analysing the *Club de l'Horloge, SOS Racisme*, Young Anarchists and New Era/the Danish Association one observes certain analogies between certain aspects of the social actors' life-world and their national imagination. That is, their essential values and preoccupations seem to pattern their national imaginations. In particular three factors are important. Firstly, the social actor's childhood, their school and professional education, and their political involvement. These characteristics can be described as their generational belonging, in the sense that at crucial points in their life they shared similar experiences which gave them certain values and a certain world-view. Secondly, their social origins, their social role and their expectations imply that they share similar preoccupation and future prospects. Thirdly, their political convictions that are strong among the members of the four groups who all are politically active, mostly on the political extremes.

To exemplify how these three factors pattern national imaginations, the case of the *Club de l'Horloge* is particular illustrative. The members of the *Club* grew up in a post-war France, where national feelings were still strong and in social environments which were likely to be Catholic, conservative and strongly attached to national values. Accordingly, the members of the *Club* imagine a France which is characterised by these same values and with a national

boundary which excludes anything or anybody who is believed to endanger this France. The main leading members were educated in the prestigious and competitive *grandes écoles* (*Ena, Polytechnique*), which are based upon the idea of meritocracy aiming at educating the 'elite'. Having adopted these values the members of the *Club* are in general preoccupied by marking out and preserving their social role as an elite. This preoccupation is reflected in their national imagination of a France with a pronounced social hierarchy in which they fulfil a social role which corresponds to their educational and professional competencies and expectations. Many members are active in national, local or European politics and they represent the most conservative and national tendency on the French Right. That is, when the *gaulliste* party, RPR (*Rassemblement pour la République*) under Jacques Chirac, adopted a politic which they considered to be too modern and European, they adhered to the National Front Party or to Philip de Villiers' party *Mouvement pour la France*. Their national conservative views clearly pattern their nostalgic national imagination. Their France is the one of the 1950s which had not yet transferred parts of its national sovereignty to the EU and which was more than just a middle-range European state.

Thus, the example of the *Club de l'Horloge* illustrates that its members imagined the nation according to that which they took-for-granted and that which pre-occupied them. A similar pattern can be observed in the other three case-studies. In New Era and the Danish Association leading members grew up in the Denmark of the 1950s and in social environments where national values were likely to be particularly strong and where 'the father worked and the mother took care of the children at home'. Those are the values which they project onto their national imagination of a Denmark, which is the one that existed before economic wealth had made the expansion of the welfare state possible and the sixty-eight-generation had liberalised social morals and traditions. Many of the leading members of New Era and the Danish Association are either clergymen, lawyers, policemen or civil servants. Common for these professions is that the 'law', that of God and of the State, is crucial and the reference to the 'law' is not surprisingly omnipresent in their discourse on the nation and immigrants. Denmark is Danish because it is the word of God and it should remain so and immigrants and refugees cannot become Danish because they do not know how to respect this law.

The young founders and leading members of *SOS-Racisme* grew up in the 1970s and went to the Republican school in the Parisian suburbs, where they were either friends with children of foreign origins (Algerian, Moroccan, Italian, Portuguese etc.) or from French overseas departments or territories, and some of them shared these origins. In other words, multiculturality and religious differences are elements which they take-for-granted, and those are also fundamental values in their imagined France in which cultural and religious origins are of no importance as long as one adheres to the Universal values. In

the early eighties they go to universities in the Parisian suburbs which enjoy little recognition and which provides them with uncertain future prospects. They are actively involved in the fight for preserving the open and equal access to university for all those with a high-school diploma as well as improving their subsequent access to a French job-market on which university graduates are disfavoured in comparison to graduates from the prestigious *grandes écoles*. Precisely openness and equality are the values which caracterised the France which they imagine and cherish. It is a Republican France, which is to be reformed according to their socialist ideals of social and economic solidarity.

Equality and change are also key values for Young Anarchists. They grew up in the 1970s and went to a reformed Danish school with little emphasis on history and learnt knowledge, but on 'how to learn' and 'to be independent and creative'. They are involved in the movement of squatters in the 1980s which, in addition to requiring housing, was an experiment of a new life-style, more faithful to their anarchist ideas. For them, history, tradition and the nation is of little, if any, importance and, not surprisingly, their imagination of Denmark is anti-national in the sense that they consider national belonging to be deprived of any meaning.

Yet though generational belonging and social role of the social carriers were important, these two factors are just one among two other sources which pattern the social actors imagination the nation. A second source is the available historical codings of the nation, since rather than just imagining a nation, the social actors re-imagined existing images of the French and the Danish nation. Thus, the point of departure of the French groups, the *Club de l'Horloge* and *SOS Racisme* are respectively a 'closed and conservative' coding and an 'open and progressive' coding of the French nation[6]. The Danish groups, Young Anarchists and New Era/the Danish Association start out from the Danish self-image of a little, innocent and human nation. Yet, none of the French groups, nor the Danish ones, did merely reproduce existing historical codings when reproducing these codings, rather the social actors adapt them, as illustrated above, according to that, which give meaning in relation to their particular life-world and to the specific situational context. That is to say, existing codes are reformulated in the light of the national societies of the nineteen-eighties and nineteen-nineties and, in particular to prevailing norms in France and Denmark respectively and to the arguments of their opponents (see below).

National Comparisons

The impact of the historical codings and the situational context on the reconstruction processes are further illustrated by a comparison between the two countries in which the social actors re-imagine the nations, namely France and Denmark. The national debates on immigration differ in particular with respect

to the way in which national memories of former encounters with an 'other' interfer by either constraining or facilitating the way in which the nation can be imagined in a legitimate way.

In France, it was the national memory of the Second World War (the Vichy regime) and the decolonisation which appeared to be predominantly constraining in the sense that both pro- and anti-immigrants had to adapt existing but discredited historical codings of the French nation[7]. Thus, the *Club de l'Horloge* drives at demarcating itself from any association with the France of Vichy, from former supporters for the maintenance of a French Algeria (*Organisation de l'Armée Secrète*) as well as from any anti-Republican forces. Conversely, the Club tries to present itself as being Republican assuming the values of *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité* and to re-legitimise 'the nation and nationalism' which subsequent to the Second World War were associated with war and racism. Nevertheless, when doing so the predominantly constraining national memory can also occasionally be turned into arguments favouring the nationalist and anti-immigrant views of the *Club de l'Horloge*. Arguments such as 'if Algeria has the right to its own culture and nation, then France has as well', or 'if the co-existence between French and Algerians did not succeed in Algeria, nor will it in France' (common argument in their writings)[8].

However, it is particularly the pro-immigrants and *SOS Racisme* which are able to use the national memory as a rhetorical weapon. As a symbol of exclusion or even extermination of a culturally and racially 'other', *SOS Racisme* uses the national memory of Vichy and of colonialism to state 'never again' and to de-legitimise any policies restricting the individual rights of immigrants or asylum seekers. Nevertheless, even for *SOS Racisme* the national memory raises obstacles which have to be overcome. In its drive to bring out believed 'universal values', the Republic had disregarded culture and dialects in the provinces ('*patois*'), and in the colonies as well as those of immigrants in its drive to assimilate them into the French political community. Thus, when defining French specificity as its '*universalité*' in interviews with the author, the members of *SOS Racisme* all added that though '*universalité*' had been abused, it was still a fundamental and positive value. In their interpretation, '*universalité*' meant that France was capable of receiving and integrating people from all over the world and therefore of being an example of peaceful pluri-cultural co-existence (common argument in their writings).

Unlike France, the Danish memory appeared predominantly as a source of legitimacy, since the national memory of the Second World War and colonialism appeared to have strengthened a self-image of being 'little, human and innocent' (Zølner, 1998: 72-91). Thus, instead of constraining the way in which national identity could be imagined, the memories of the Second World War and colonialism appear as sources of legitimacy. Moreover, this is particularly the case for the anti-immigrants who, unlike their French

counterparts, did not have to overcome a memory of 'guilt' since the Danish memory of both the Second World War and decolonisation is characterised by 'innocence'. That is, this memory retains events which confirms the national self-image as little, human and innocent (such as the rescue action of the Danish Jews during the German Occupation, and the abolition of slavery on the Virgin Islands in 1848) while precluding events which contradict this image (such as the fact that the Danish borders were closed for German Jewish refugees in 1938, and Danish activities, on for example, Greenland)[9]. Thus, New Era and in particular the Danish Association can, therefore, present themselves as the successors of the resistance movement which, during the Second World War, fought against the foreign intruders and the national betrayers. Their use of vocabulary and images clearly indicate that in the nineteen-eighties and the nineteen-nineties, the national betrayers to be combated were the politicians who had voted a too lax immigration legislation, while immigrants and refugees were the foreign intruders. Young Anarchists refer to nazism as the ultimate evil to be combated, but almost without any references to the Danish history of the Second World War (see below).

Thus, the comparison of the two nations illustrates that both positive or negative memories of former encounters with the 'other' constitute one factor which determines the way in which the social actors imagine the 'other' in a legitimate way. Yet, the country comparison also illustrates that different national histories and traditions shape the national imaginations of the four groups differently. This takes us to the historical codings of the two nations. In France, the social actors defined national unity and particularity in terms of history representing national ideas and values. Thus, when speaking with the author almost all interviewees defined their nation by giving a long speech on history. Yet, the social actors did also debate these ideas which led to the refutation of former interpretations and the elaboration of new ones. Thus, the *Club de l'Horloge* reinterprets French universalism in the sense that France should be an example of how national particularity can be preserved despite globalisation (understood as 'the American way of life' and the spread of Islam). In other words, according to the *Club*, the real universal message, which France is to bring, is: firstly that it is only through national belonging that a person can achieve freedom; secondly, that all nations/identities have an equal right to exist, and thirdly, that fraternity is the feeling between nationals. Conversely, *SOS Racisme* adheres to a French universalism redefined as the capacity of the Republic to assure social and economic integration of immigrants despite their cultural and religious diversity. Both the author's interviews with leading members of the two groups and their writings are examples of this process of reflection and reinterpretation of French history, nation and its republican values.

On the contrary, in Denmark, the case-studies do not provide similar examples of debating and reflecting upon values and ideas and only few

interviewees evoked history when asked to define the nation. Moreover, when anti-immigrants referred to history this was done implicitly by the connotations of words, symbols, and songs. Rather than history and ideas to be debated, Danishness appeared to be a question of 'being', that is of being born Danish or as living as such. Moreover, unlike the French social actors those in Denmark did not present themselves as an 'elite' with a specific knowledge and understanding of the nation. On the contrary, the Danes presented themselves as the 'people', or as having a specific knowledge because they lived among the people, which was believed to represent the very essence of Danishness. Finally, neither the pro- nor the anti-immigrants presented Denmark as a nation which had a lesson to teach other countries (Zølner, 1998:197-250).

Thus, we can conclude that the social actors situate themselves within their respective national traditions of how to define the nation, of its role in the world and of who incarnates the nation. In France, it is history and ideas, which the elite know and develop, whereas in Denmark the nation is the people and its traditions. This leads to a brief comment on the fact that elements from the life-worlds of the social carriers also determine whether or not the national history was evoked, since to do so required that the social actors had a certain knowledge of this history and that they considered it to be relevant. But this was not the case for the Young Anarchists in Denmark. The analysis of their life-world indicates that they have little historical knowledge and that they also find that the past is of no importance, since, as one interviewee said to the author, 'we live here and now' (Zølner, 1998:231-250). Thus, though the Young Anarchists could have used the history as a rhetorical weapon against their opponents, as their French counterparts did, they did not do so. Moreover, despite the fact they define themselves as Anarchists they hardly refer to the political history of Anarchism, but exclusively to contemporary movements of squatters in Europe (Germany, the Netherlands).

Trans-National Comparisons

The third comparison is trans-national, that is between pro-immigrants (*SOS Racisme* and Young Anarchists), on the one hand, and anti-immigrants, on the other (the *Club de l'Horloge* and New Era/the Danish Association). This transnational comparison confirms first of all the importance of the social carriers' life-world and, in particular, generational characteristics. Anti-immigrants in both countries belong to the age-group that grew up when national feelings were still strong and in social environments in which these feelings were likely to be particularly intense. Moreover, in both countries their mobilisation had been stimulated and shaped by a sharp opposition to the contemporary generation of 1968, which, for both the *Club de l'Horloge* and the Danish groups of anti-immigrants, functions as an ideological 'other' next to the immigrant 'other'. Conversely, pro-immigrants belonged to an age-group

generation which grew up in the nineteen-sixties and -seventies when the importance of 'national' belonging declined as well as its legitimacy (i.e. French decolonisation and the Algerian War; reforms of school programmes in Denmark in the early nineteen-seventies).

To look at the life-world of the pro- and anti-immigrants is also illuminating for comprehending their divergent attitudes to immigrants. The life-worlds of the pro-immigrants contain a positive image of the 'immigrant other'. In the case of *SOS Racisme* it is likely to stem from personal contact and friendship with young people of immigrant origins, be it in school or in their neighbourhood. This experience appears to be projected upon all immigrants. Artists and personalities of foreign origin symbolise that encounters with other cultures are enriching. Conversely, Young Anarchists had had little, if any, contact with immigrants and their positive image most likely came from their ideological conviction (i.e. solidarity with working class, Third World etc.) rather than personal contact. As a matter of fact, when Young Anarchists described encounters with immigrants in interviews with the author, they qualified such personal contact as difficult if not unpleasant, and their descriptions were indeed little flattering for the immigrants in question. Men of foreign origins were considered to be 'macho' and boys to be too violent when playing. This indicates that Young Anarchists experienced a cultural clash which was not national but rather a clash between their own ideological convictions (militant feminism, anarchism and rejection of tradition) and the life and values of immigrant minorities in Denmark.

Unlike the life-worlds of the pro-immigrants, that of the anti-immigrants in general contains negative images of the immigrant other. These images stem most likely from contact with negative ideas of this 'other', since contact appeared to be limited to impersonal encounters in streets, shops or apartment buildings. Moreover, when anti-immigrants spoke to the author about immigrants that they knew individually they were ready to consider a particular immigrant positively, either because 's/he worked well' or 's/he mastered the national language and culture'. Yet, other exceptions were also granted according to different criteria in Denmark and France. In their writings or in interviews with the author members of the *Club de l'Horloge* acknowledged the bravery and loyalty of former soldiers of Algerian origin who had fought for France, but likewise the contribution of personalities of European origin to French culture. In comparison, the Danish anti-immigrants would acknowledge the reception of people in need (refugees) as a respect of Danish tradition of behaving 'decently' and 'morally'. What these examples illustrate is that the anti-immigrants are ready to accept the presence of some 'foreigners' if their stay or their behaviour correspond to prevalent ideas of their imagined nation. That is, to a French self-image of playing a universal role and of a nation in which membership was determined by merit and, to the Danish self-image as being a nation characterised by humanity.

Finally, the situational context provides us with an understanding of why and how the social actors discussed the nation and immigration in the nineteen-eighties and -nineties. The pro-immigrants developed a discourse on the nation in response to their opponents. In addition to moral indignation and ideological conviction these issues were adopted for strategic reasons due to their capacity to unite their groups (against an opponent) and eventually to appeal beyond the original group of sympathisers. This resulted in a reluctant discourse on the nation: either a rejection of the nation (Young Anarchists in Denmark) or, when the issue could no longer be avoided, with a definition as inclusive as possible (*SOS Racisme* in France). For the anti-immigrants, the nation is not a new topic, nor is the importance attributed to national values, but the situational context of the nineteen-eigties and -nineties make a national and anti-immigrant discourse a salient as well as a propitious issue (i.e. a context of social crisis, emergence of the National Front in France; sharp increase of asylum seekers in Denmark). Nevertheless, as stated above, their national conceptions are adapted to the situational context of post-war Europe. Most notable is the fact that words such as 'race' are avoided in public discourse (though these words were used in informal talk, which the author observed during their meetings or when conducting interviews) as well as ideas of 'inequality' of cultures. Thus, both in France and in Denmark, the anti-immigrants define the difference of the 'other' in cultural terms, and when forced to comment on the term of 'inequality', members of the *Club de l'Horloge* interpreted it in the sense of simply being different (subsequent to the accusation of the member of the National Front, Catherine Mégret, for having stated that she believed in the 'inequality of races').

Conclusion

This paper has argued the usefulness of analysing the way in which identities are constructed as a complex interaction between the life-world of their social carriers, available historical codings and the situational context. The national identities of the four groups are not patterned by one factor, nor can one establish a unidirectional cause-effect relationship. My argument is, conversely, that their national identities are shaped by three sources and their dynamic interaction: existing historical codings, situational contexts and the life-worlds of their social carriers.

This offers us a hypothesis regarding the way in which national identities are, in general, constructed. Namely, that there is a certain analogy between the historical codings of a nation, its social carriers and the situational context, on the one hand, and their national imagination, on the other. The national imagination needs to give meaning to their life-world, and to be legitimate and propitious in the situational context. Thus, existing historical codings are being re-imagined according to the life-worlds of their social carriers and to the

situational context in order to create a meaningful coherence. Consequently, reconstructing national identities is a process which is driven by the taken-for-granted values of its social carriers but also by their reflection and strategic considerations.

End Notes

[1] From the outset, it is important to stress that the fundamental criteria for the selection of the four case-studies were whether the case-studies could further the understanding of the processes of reconstructing national identities. Thus, the analysis of the case-studies are not to be read as representative examples of French or Danish identities, nor does the analysis aim at establishing causal explanations

[2] My analyses of the four groups are based on: writings published by individual members or by the associations; 43 interviews conducted with leading and ordinary members; several participant observations of their meetings and finally; newspaper articles and secondary literature whenever this was accessible.

[3] Author's translation of the Danish names: *Tidehverv* (New Era) and *Den Danske Forening* (The Danish Association).

[4] Author's translation of the Danish name: *De Autonome* (Young Anarchists).

[5] Anti-immigrants will be defined as those who argued to restrict the rights of immigrants and even to send them out of the country whereas as pro-immigrants will refer to those who defended the rights of the immigrants in the nation.

[6] On the basis of scholarly French literature one can distinguish two ideal-types of the French nation. On the one hand, a predominant republican discourse and, on the other hand, a challenging counter-nationalism (Girardet, 1972; Winock, 1990 [1982]; Todorov, 1989, Agulhon, 1992; Nora, 1992; Birnbaum, 1993; Taguieff, 1995). The former conceives of the nation as a political community consisting of equal individuals for whom belonging to the nation-state is the result of a rational choice. This open and republican coding of the nation is characterised by an optimistic belief in a future in which progress will bring a new and better society than the old and traditional one. Conversely, the second ideal-type, counter-nationalism, was conservative and traditional and formulated in direct opposition to the republican national idea. Refuting the values of the Enlightenment, it submitted the individual to the collectivity and to history and sought a strengthening of traditional authorities and values. These were the values of a Catholic and rural France with its regional cultural diversity, which were placed in opposition to those of secular, urban, industrialised France.

[7] See the foot note above.

[8] This confirms Duraton-Crabol's conclusion in her analysis of the New Right (GRECE) (1988) and those of Taguieff in his analysis of the New Right and its predominant leader, Alain de Benoist (1994). Both scholars argue that the GRECE, from within which the Club de l'Horloge originated, strived to elaborate a new conservative doctrine to regain credibility.

[9] ØstergŒrd (1992), Petersen (1993), Nielsen (1993); Larsen (1992); Kreth, R. & M. Mogensen (1995); Fog Olwig (1994).

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